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The publication for
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users and developers.

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#17

15 October 1984

This Month's Mailbag

Mailing Labels And 1stBase and PFS And...

This is hardly a review of various database packages, but I can give you some very quick impressions.

1stBase seems well put together, and has on-screen help menus that nearly eliminate the need for using the manual at all. Nearly, but not quite. It supports two disk drives, and is partially copyable. You can copy files or even the entire disk to another disk, but the original disk must be inserted before you can run the program. I didn't find any

indication that a file could extend beyond a single 400K disk, but it appears a large file could be maintained on a hard disk. If there is a method to calculate the largest possible file size, I couldn't find it. Since I have a requirement to sort nearly 3,000 entries, ultimate file size is quite important to me. I couldn't tell if 1stBase can take advantage of the new 512K Macs or not.

It does support ascending or descending sorts on several fields, it allows you to transfer data from one file to selected fields in a different file, and it allows you to append data from one file to another. Nice! Deleted records are not actually deleted, but

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flagged so they show up dimmed on the screen. They can be resurrected if desired. The deleted records are physically eliminated when the file is "compressed". That is a very desirable feature. I hate databases that actually erase deleted records, with no chance of recovery.

Searches allow simple wild card entries, but it is not possible to search for a string of three or four characters somewhere in a field. Reports can be sent to the screen, to the Imagewriter printer, or to disk. Reports that are 85 columns or less are automatically printed in an 85-column format. Reports that are more than 85 columns wide are automatically printed in a different font, in a 132-column format. Also very nice! Reports saved on disk can be accessed and edited with MacWrite. Of course, MacWrite can handle only limited length files.

Mailing lists are also possible, but it took quite a bit of poring over the instruction manual to find out how. Maintenance of mailing lists is a prime use of a database! I'd have a special chapter, conspicuously placed in the table of contents, describing maintaining, sorting, and printing mailing lists. Unfortunately, 1stBase cannot use any printer other than the Imagewriter, unless a separate program such as the Daisywheel Connection is used. The reports are actually sent as ASCII files, with a beginning "set-up string" of characters to set the Imagewriter to the needed configuration, so extending 1stBase to allow users to set up their own printer configuration would be an almost trivial programming task, and would let virtually any printer be used, without any special additional programs. For example, I could print mailing labels with my trusty old Mannesman Tally, with its straight-through feed that bypasses the platen and thus prevents popping the labels off the backing during printing.

I found 1stBase an acceptable database, with many very good features. But its inability to (a) allow an advance calculation of the number of records that can be maintained on a single disk, (b) support databases that extend beyond a single disk, (c) support full wild card searches, and (d) allow

a customized printer set-up string make it unsuitable for my own needs.

Anyone who has used PFS:File and/or PFS:Report on any other computer will be familiar with its basic characteristics on the Macintosh. The standard Macintosh menus, icons, and mouse selections are used. Two disk drives are supported. The program is quite tightly copy protected (nothing can be copied from the program disk), but a backup disk is supplied. PFS:File very readily maintains mailing lists. In fact, you can print mailing labels with PFS:File alone.

PFS:Report is only needed for more elaborate reports. PFS:File allows sorts on any one field. Files can be copied, in whole or in part, divided into smaller files, or two files can be merged into one large file.

It is fairly easy to calculate the probable disk space required for any proposed file. Individual forms are easy to design. You can't delete a record, and then change your mind. Deleted records are gone forever, which is not a good feature! Searches are very flexible, allowing *equals*, *between*, *not*, and so on. Wild card searches can easily find any selected string of characters, anywhere in a data field. For example, a search for ".ile.." would find records including "file", "pile", "while" and so on. That's very handy if you can't remember the exact spelling of a person's name.

PFS:Report is designed to prepare and print tabular reports. It supports calculations upon fields, and it can automatically perform an alphabetical sort of the first three fields when printing a report. Other sorts can be performed in advance of printing. In effect, you can sort and print mailing labels by ZIPs, and alphabetically by last name within ZIP codes. Reports can be sent to the screen, to the printer, or written to disk and (if small enough) then accessed with MacWrite.

What would I like? Well, I'd like 1stBase with the PFS printer control flexibility and DB Master's ability to maintain files that extend to several disks. Our local dealer has OverVUE, but I've only had time to take a very cursory look at it. It seems to resemble a strange sort of cross between a database and Multiplan. I had the impression I could



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Vol. 1 No. 2

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easily set up a complete double-entry bookkeeping system for my wife's farming operations with it. However, the blankety-blank manual was about the most wretchedly written monstrosity I have seen. Why must manual makers make it so difficult to find out *what* a program can do? They seem to spend all of their efforts telling you *how* to do things, regardless of whether you want to do any of those things or not. I want to know *what* a program can do, *and then find out how to do it!*

My telephone offer to send you a Habadex file with 275 entries still stands. I feel Habadex is overpriced. I'd be willing to fork over \$100 for it, but not \$200. Also, it should be usable as a desk accessory, and not have to always be loaded in place of the program already running. I have put as much time into Habadex as I intend to.

Jean E. Olson, Cambridge, IA

We haven't had time to do anything more than inspect the packaging of the complimentary copy of 1stBase that recently arrived. Although the disk is elaborately buried inside the manual's back cover with a special seal that (once it's opened) invokes the license agreement, we noticed the binding is poorly glued, and simply pulling the cover away from the spine allows the disk to be slipped out without ever breaking the seal! They should have just sealed the disk shutter like Habadex does. Aren't these various Macintosh copy protection schemes a real pain? We like Lisa's method of allowing the user to make any number of copies of "protected masters", but it's a scheme that's fairly easy for pirates to bypass. As for printers, isn't it the operating system's job to worry about multiple devices, not the application's job? The Mac needs a printer driver mover, just like the font mover. The System file's printer interface has actually been designed with such interchangeability in mind, but Apple seems to be a little tight on support in that area. We've heard one reason is that Apple is concerned about letting just anyone offer any kind of printer for the Mac, thereby degrading the product's "overall quality". Still, plenty of vendors seem to be

coming out with various methods of attaching non-Apple printers. We happen to have an Imagewriter that does almost nothing except print miscellaneous mailing labels. We've found that as long as we use high quality labels (like Avery), everything works fine. Cheaper labels tend to be thicker and stiffer and end up peeling and jamming. For your interest, the system we use to maintain our mailing lists (no, it's not an Apple) uses convenient specifiers like START] to find only the fields that begin with a string, [FINISH to find only the strings that end with the given characters, and [MIDDLE] to find all the fields containing a substring anywhere. Your observation about a cross between a database and a spreadsheet hints at what we think most computer users really need: a mix of the two that offers easy manipulation and editing like a spreadsheet along with the size and sorting power of a huge database system. And thanks for responding to our search for a large Habadex demo file. Haba Systems eventually answered our request, but the disk they sent had only 18 records! Fortunately, a subscriber in North Carolina actually has managed to enter 396 records, while at the same time discovering the package's pros and cons. He's finishing up his review for us now. Notice how so many applications for the Macintosh would be more useful if they were implemented as desk accessories? Desk accessories are actually just a limited way to do what the Lisa already does much better: simultaneously displaying windows for multiple applications. -MG

Testimonial From A Satisfied Customer

This is an answer to an issue #12 request by K. Y. Fisher for Lisa software to maintain mailing lists. I would like to bring to your attention the existence of Omnis 3 database software published by Blythe Computers of England and distributed by Organizational Software of San Mateo, CA.

I have had Omnis 3 on my Lisa 2/5 for two months and find it quite flexible. While this program is not simple to learn, it is a relational database and very powerful. It takes advantage of Lisa's 68000 quickness, which is not usually evident under the Lisa

operating system. I am presently using it for a mailing list of over 1,400 names and can sort it by ZIP, by alphabet, or whatever other sequence I desire, and can print labels even three across. The information takes less space in Omnis than it would in LisaWrite, and I can download the list onto diskettes and free up the space for another use.

I understand that it will be possible to operate Omnis from the desktop by the end of 1984, but at present it uses the Environments window.

Joan D. Dickey, Moss Beach, CA

Any Pascal Workshop program that meets certain requirements can execute from an icon-based window on the 7/7 desktop and can cut and paste with other Lisa applications by relying on the new Quickport facility in the 3.0 release. Quickport appears to be the vehicle that products like Omnis or Keystroke from Brock Software Products are using to finally start filling the vacuum known as third-party Lisa desktop software. By the way, there's also a version called Omnis 2 for the Macintosh, but InfoWorld gave it a scathing review in its September 10th issue. -MG

A Report On Aztec C

I just received my Aztec C compiler (professional version) from Manx Software Systems, and I thought I'd give you my impressions.

First, why did I choose this compiler? It was the only one I could find on the market that was a true compiler, that offered access to the Toolbox, and that didn't require an assembler. I'm pretty happy with it. The first thing I did was write a standard C program, then modify it to:

```
/* HELLO - print "Hello world!" in the New York font */
#include <quickdraw.h> /* Define function calls */
#include <font.h> /* Define constants */
main () {TextFont(newYork); /* Let Quickdraw set font */
printf("Hello world!\n");} /* Print text & newline */
```

This works! Aztec C provides a restricted Unix-like environment in which you can write programs that act like they would on any computer: they display text on a scrolling screen, and accept keyboard input. Mac capabilities like the mouse pointer aren't

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supported. The above program can only be run from this limited environment (it can't be started from the Finder).

The nice part is that Aztec C also allows you to write programs which use Macintosh features like the mouse and menu bar and that can be started from the Finder. The catch is, these programs are a *lot* harder to write, because they're event-driven. You can't just read keyboard input, you also have to worry about mouse clicks, making a menu selection, and even disk insertions. I did write a program which opens a window and grays the Edit menu. When a desk accessory is selected, it un-grays the menu choices. Unfortunately, it doesn't do anything meaningful, but it took a couple days of learning just to get it that far.

The system comes with a program editor based on the Unix editor named vi. It's OK, but it isn't a true screen editor. Manx has promised a mouse-based editor.

So Aztec C is a real Mac development language. What's wrong with it? First off, the documentation isn't too hot. An index would be a real blessing, but even a table of contents would be nice. The \$500 price is a bit steep. The system takes up most of a disk, which means single-drive development is really hampered. And using more than a couple of Toolbox managers (e.g. window, event, Quickdraw) in one module is pretty difficult, since on a 128K machine you don't have enough memory to compile. Luckily, there's a linker which allows routines to be compiled separately. It's copy protected, but not too obnoxiously: you need to insert the original disk when you start running the C environment.

The biggest problem isn't really Manx's, it's Apple's. If you don't have a Lisa, you have a real hard time working with resource files. You can't get the Finder to display different icons for files because there's no resource editor or compiler.

David Dunham, Goleta, CA

This Letter Was Titled HELP!

I am writing in an attempt to find someone directly or vaguely associated with Apple that either knows some answers or *cares* enough to

find them. In July 1983, my company purchased a Lisa with two Profiles. This was a very nice place to work prior to that date. Please do not misinterpret my meaning, as the areas that the Lisa functions properly in and that are not shrouded in mystery are very remarkable and we have benefited greatly. But, ulcers was never a common word in this building prior to that date either, assuming ulcers can be caused from utter and complete frustration.

From the beginning, LisaCalc has chosen to destroy documents with no rhyme or reason. The response of the personnel at the toll-free support number was "I have not had any other customers with that problem. Please send the documents to us on disk." That was after six weeks of phone calls and rekeying by myself and our salesman. I absolutely broke down with that suggestion. I did not even have enough diskettes to keep a current backup of the system, could not get any from our dealer, could not find a catalog supplier who knew of any, and she wanted me to mail her some! Upon regaining my composure and explaining the situation, she very kindly said she would send me at least two disks to use to send her the documents. It is now thirteen months later and I am still waiting for the two disks to arrive.

One suggestion was that I may be building documents too large for the limits of the program. When I asked about the limits of a LisaCalc document, no one knew. To this day, I guess no one knows.

When I learned of the 2/5 upgrade for the Lisa from an outside source, I again called the 800 number and inquired as to why I had to find this information by accident. She was unclear as to if the upgrade would help our situation or exactly what the upgrade consisted of, but after all, it was free. My thought was that it should come with full hospital coverage.

At the suggestion of our dealer after the upgrade was installed, I duplicated every document we have on file, renamed same, saved same, and threw away the original versions. I have to say our losses are greatly reduced.

We are constantly haunted with system

halts that have to be corrected by pushing the reset button on the back of the console, which evolves into a repair having to run, which causes all folders to be destroyed. It takes two hours to re-folder 170 documents after the 30 to 60 minute repair. Also, our extra Profile has refused to perform on three separate occasions.

Now you'd think that this is one woman who knows the value of backups, right? Well, I have plenty of the original 5.25" disks, which were not available until our system was three months old. Then our dealer ran right over here with a good supply. But I now have a Lisa with 80 5.25" disks and a disk drive that uses 3.5" disks due to the upgrade and guess what? I've had an order in for 50 more 3.5" disks since July, but they're not available! It takes twelve disks to backup each of our Profiles. I run one copy every Thursday night. I no longer can keep a grandfather generation backup for obvious reasons. Due to diskettes being erased prior to copying, it's risky doing a backup without a grandfather file.

As time passed and our needs increased, we decided to install Lisa BASIC. I guess some fools just never learn. Upon trying to wade through the documentation that Apple provides, I decided to try the hot line, because my dealer stated they knew nothing about this BASIC and didn't expect to be learning because all attention was being diverted to Macintosh. OK, I thought (until I saw the documentation): if I could read the manual, I could write a system from scratch and not need any support. The 800 phone number gave a couple shots at helping. Results: 1. Our editor has never worked. Maybe it is something I am doing wrong, but no one can suggest anything to try different. 2. I cannot control the printer from within programs. I was given another phone number to call.

Six days later when I got through to the new number, their answer to the first problem was that I should contact our dealer and have a new copy of BASIC installed and the old disks returned. I asked for this twelve days ago and have not heard anything. Do you suppose they care?

Their answer to problem two was that my

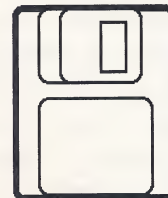
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printer is not covered in the documentation and that it would be easier for them to just jot down the appropriate code and mail it to me. My first thought was to the disks I never received from the 800 number, but I bit my tongue and just agreed. I don't have six days free to dial the phone number continually to try and get through again!

I then asked about the 7/7 upgrade. They said I have to have a coupon from my dealer to send in with the Office System 1 disk and then the whole package is delivered to my doorstep, but without the coupon I need not try. Coupons are supposedly available from the dealer's distribution center and I just have to have my dealer call and request one. Guess what? My dealer doesn't know what a distribution center is!

Our salesman and the BASIC manual said to copy the masters and put them away for safe keeping. Since we have only one diskette drive, I asked if they are copyable to a Profile and then to a blank diskette. His comment: that's a good question. (Not that I have any blank 3.5" disks.) Other questions that no one seems to be able to answer: Did the upgrade correct the LisaCalc Apple-period problem? If I had to restore the Profile from backups, would BASIC be reloaded? Why are the first five diskettes of the backup showing 74 or less blocks available yet no visible icons? Can I retrieve a BASIC program from a Profile backup?

It has occurred to me to try another local dealer, but apparently the one that handles Lisas locally is the one that I am currently attempting to deal with. Dead end there! My company has purchased upwards of ten Apple computers and numerous printers from one dealer, not to mention all the software and cards. Does this warrant some sort of support or concern from that dealer? I guess I know that answer: *NO*.

I may only be one employee, one not of management level, one that is not contacted when corporate questions or purchasing policies are reviewed, but when the question of Macintosh purchases is carried around the building, you can bet your bootie this kid is going to try hard to start a protest (riot if necessary) to *BUY IBM!*

I do not suppose Apple will suffer as a result, but my son just graduated from programming courses at college and I gave him a complete Commodore 64 system. When my daughter became involved with a business in the startup stages, they called to inquire about the systems that I was familiar with. Although I can't tell them what would be best to buy, I sure do know what to steer them away from. I am glad to report that they took my advice.

The saddest part of this whole situation is that this could probably all be resolved within 30 minutes if someone knew the answers or put in an hour looking for them prior to returning my call. If someone out there reads this and knows a place I can contact, I am at 309-764-4344, extension 200.

Sue Gramling, Moline, IL

At least your Lisa has kept your job from being boring! But seriously, we agree many of your complaints are justified. On the other hand, we also think you've made some mistakes. For example, it's wrong to assume everything will go smoothly if you can just find the right telephone support. It's kind of like expecting to learn to drive a car over the phone. Today's computers, even a Lisa, are still just too user-unfriendly for that easy of a solution. Your biggest requirement is finding an informed dealer who can provide you with decent support. Although there might not be any close by, a good far away dealer is still going to be a lot better than a nearby lousy one. We remember an old user group newsletter describing LisaCalc's capacity as 500 kilobytes; the 7/7 version now provides a menu option showing memory consumption. A Lisa that crashes as you describe is definitely sick and in need of hardware repairs. Again, you'll need a decent dealer's repair shop to do the work. To save time after a crash, it may be faster to list all your documents chronologically, then move anything changed since the last backup to floppies, and then do a complete restore from backups instead of re-folding. A way to save time and floppies during backups is to do one full backup and then only use nightly incremental ("changes only") backups as long

as possible. This method works well under 2.0, often never requiring more than one or two floppies for weeks, but our past issues have reported potential bugs in 7/7 and in the backup of Workshop files. You really should never have considered installing BASIC. The Workshop environment is designed for experienced programmers, and is a far cry from the kind of programming environment you'll find on a system like your son's. Don't expect much Workshop support, especially over the phone, unless you're willing to do something like pay a consultant. In fact, we understand Apple has decided to discontinue offering Lisa BASIC. Masters can be copied to the Profile using the Workshop's file manager (be careful of file name conflicts), but since the master files already have been copied to the Profile during the installation procedure and are backed up along with the rest of your Profile each Thursday, it's probably not really necessary to make copies. The Apple-period bug has supposedly been fixed since 2.0, but we avoid using it out of habit. Yes, BASIC is reloaded when you restore from backups. Some backup disks seem blank because they are used for storing various files that do not have a desktop icon counterpart. You can use the Workshop file manager to list or retrieve such files on any disk. Our last observation is that it seems the Lisa is the first computer you've had to deal with. It's obviously been a learning experience that has taught you a lot concerning dealers, backup procedures, documentation, media, and so on. When you approach your next computer, you'll already know about many of the potential problems to look out for. But any computer built today, not just the Lisa, would present those same kinds of frustrating problems to any first-time user. Therefore, be careful and don't assume that using a Commodore or an IBM or anything else would necessarily have been easier. -MG

Where Does One Go For An Upgrade?

Your issue #14 report on the Lisa 7/7 Office System brings a bit of pain to this Lisa 1 owner, who wonders when, or if, he'll ever be able to use that new software.

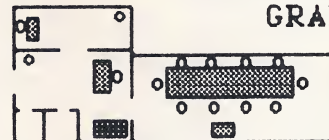
My dealer in Pasadena states that except for kits to convert his demos, they have never received any Lisa upgrade kits for their customers. I call Cupertino about once each month, and for several months the kits were "about a month away". But, the September call reported "not before November".

Looking through previous issues of *Signal*, it appears that your upgrade kit arrived in March. In your June issue #13, a dealer in Ann Arbor reports that they have upgraded

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three times as many Lisas as they originally sold.

Am I the only one out here with an orphan Lisa 1? Should I bundle her off to Ann Arbor? Aptos? The Mindanao Trench? There are a lot of us, some irate, judging from the comments of my dealer and the customer service reps in Cupertino.

It would be much appreciated, at least to me, if *Signal* could dedicate a status box to the latest Lisa upgrade kit predictions each month.

Joe Reed, Arcadia, CA

Letters like yours and the one that follows made us do a little checking with Apple. Please read on... -MG

Soapbox Time For A Lisa User

I would like to offer some praise, and some regrettable criticism, of Apple and its new 32 bit technology:

To begin with, after nearly six years of personal computer ownership, my Lisa is the first machine that does the things for which I originally bought a computer. It expands my capacity to create, which is more important than simply increasing my productivity. With LisaDraw, and to a lesser degree LisaProject, I can accomplish tasks with the Lisa which were not possible on the IBM PC, the TRS-80 Model 12, the Commodore 8032, or any other small computer I have used.

On the other hand, I remain consistently frustrated by Apple's refusal to take the Lisa seriously. Why is it taking so long to get my 7/7 upgrade? Why don't they use an 8 megahertz, or even a 12 megahertz 68000 chip to improve the machine's speed? Why can't LisaTerminal autoanswer? Why is LisaList so miserably poor? Why has AppleBus taken so long to deliver? (Two Lisas in our building are linked by their serial ports and swap information daily. Inter-machine communication should not be so tough to implement.)

I read in an issue of *ST. Mac* that Apple may be withdrawing support for the Lisa and, in particular, the Office System. Your own publication talks about the lack of Apple support for the Toolkit and the Workshop. Are

they crazy? My dealer tells me that Lisa production now lags behind sales by a 2-1 margin and that Lisa 2/10 sales are far above the wildest predictions. It seems insanely stupid to ignore the potential for improving the desktop environment.

In short, when will Apple realize that the market has caught up with their machine? Today, a Lisa 2/10 with 7/7 is highly competitive in price and far superior in performance when compared with a PC/AT with integrated software. Apple ought to exploit this situation. Instead, it keeps talking about the vaporware available for the Macintosh. And in the meantime, those of us who bought "the world's most powerful personal computer" get shortchanged because third party developers refuse to tread where the manufacturer fears to lead.

Thanks for the soapbox.

Ralph J. Megna, Little Rock, AR

*Our own best guess is that Apple has decided that, although it can continue selling both the Lisa and the Macintosh, it can only afford to continue improving and developing one of them, and the Mac wins simply because of its tremendous success in the market, regardless of whether or not Lisa is really the world's most powerful personal computer. (While it might be the most powerful, it certainly hasn't been the most popular, although we think that's been primarily an Apple marketing problem, and certainly not the fault of the Lisa software and hardware.) We expect Lisa to essentially stay frozen from now on, while it simply waits for the Macintosh to evolve into something powerful enough to make the Lisa obsolete, although we agree with local dealer Lori Duerr who foresees a bit of a wait until the Mac has complete Lisa-style capabilities like huge disks, print queueing, and simultaneous multiple application windows. Maybe next year sometime? In the meantime, the circumstantial evidence that has piled up certainly doesn't make Lisa's future look bright: developers aren't generating much software, the Lisa isn't being advertised, and so on. (Don't forget our own "Mac Success Freezes Lisa" story way back in April's *Signal**

#11.) Real eyebrow raisers were a rumor in the September 24th issue of *Computer Retail News* predicting the demise of the Lisa line in the first half of 1985 and an even more detailed story titled "Dealers Anticipate Phaseout Of Lisa" in the subsequent October 1st issue. We asked Apple about these rumors and our own questions concerning the future of Lisa. Their response follows... -MG

A Lisa Status Report From Apple

I would like to respond to your inquiries regarding Lisa and the article in the October 1st issue of *Computer Retail News*. I feel that the quotes attributed to Apple personnel may have been misinterpreted, and should be considered in the context of our recent actions:

We have just made a substantial investment in a building in Dallas devoted entirely to Lisa production. The production line boasts increased efficiency, yields, and reliability, and is helping us meet the backlog on Lisa 2/10 systems and upgrades. In fact, all 2/10 upgrades should be complete by the middle of November. The reason for upgrade delays has been the overwhelming demand for them, and our limited capacity in the previous months. As of October 12th, we have built a 2/5 upgrade for every Lisa 1 ever built! 2/5 upgrades should all be delivered by the end of October.

Lisa shipments continue to be strong. Last month, we shipped more 2/10's than ever, produced by our new 2/10 production line. We are still seeing demand for Lisa 2 and 2/5, but that demand has been reduced by the introduction of the Macintosh 512K. We will continue to meet the demand for Lisa 2 and 2/5, but we will focus our capacity on the Lisa 2/10.

Lisa is an integral part of our office strategy. We absolutely cannot afford not to have a hard-disk based workstation in the office. The demand for hard-disk based systems remains strong, and Lisa is there to fill that demand, with its unparalleled user interface.

We will continue to refine Lisa 7/7, in light of customer inputs regarding bugs in the software, and we will continue to work on

ways of linking Lisa and Macintosh software.

I hope these conditions and actions show to you our commitment to Lisa. We will in the coming months reinforce that commitment to our salesforce and our dealers.

Timothy J. McNally,
Lisa Product Manager, Cupertino, CA

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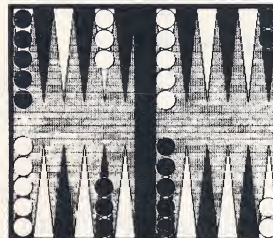
I have been a subscriber from the beginning and enjoy your input/output. However, you and your readers should be aware that all advertisers do not uphold their promises.

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not heard from them since. I have called many times and even written, but to no avail. Oh well, caveat emptor.

Richard T. Shamley, Casper, WY

In checking up on your complaint, we've made a lot of calls and listened to a lot of stories, but the bottom line is that Kenn Pierce of Pneu-Mouse has promised us he'll send you an immediate refund. Although we think there's no excuse for prematurely cashing your check, Pneu-Mouse apparently ran into a number of production problems that delayed the product. They say they are indeed now shipping. Let us know how it turns out for you. -MG 

Two Prototype Pokers Arrive

Our issue number #15 gave a Thumbs Up to the Mac-Jack blackjack game for the Macintosh from DataPak Software Inc., 14755 Ventura Blvd. #1-774, Sherman Oaks, CA 91403. Perhaps buoyed by that success, the company sent us a preliminary version of their new \$39.95 suggested retail Mac-Poker, which lets you play five card draw against the house.

Although this game is styled very much like Mac-Jack, we're going to have to give Mac-Poker a Thumbs Down. The program simply has too many poorly designed features that make it awkward and boring to play.

For example, a major problem is that your cards always appear face down unless you keep the mouse button depressed while the pointer is on a box labeled PEEK! Is that to prevent the Macintosh from seeing our cards? PEEKing never displays more than a corner of each card, anyway. All it really does is force us to memorize card positions (in an unsorted hand!), because we can't even discard until we release the PEEK box and the cards are face down again! Didn't someone actually try to play this game after it was designed? The vendor should have at least tested it on one

user before releasing it.

A number of other awkward features make Mac-Poker difficult to enjoy. The shuffling and dealing before every hand are just too slow to wait for. The eights, aces and queens are hard to read and discern. Although it may model real life, it's no fun to never get to see what the opponent folds with, so you're never sure how successful your bluffing may really be. One incredibly frustrating problem is that you must count thin coins to select just the right amount to match an existing bet. Grab too many, and you've succeeded in raising. Unfortunately, the house then seems to almost always counter-raise, and then you're back to counting coins to try to meet the new bet. It would be much better for Mac-Poker to have some quick and simple way to let the player exactly match a bet.

It wasn't surprising to find we quickly tired of playing Mac-Poker. It's just too hard to operate, and when you're only playing against one other hand, it seems to take forever before any really interesting cards come up (as opposed to blackjack, where almost every hand seems critical).

Fortunately, a good poker game finally did arrive when we received a preliminary copy of Real Poker from Henderson Associates, 980 Henderson Ave., Sunnyvale, CA 94086. For \$39.95 suggested retail, you get a version of pot-limit poker that indeed lives up to its name of being just like the real thing.

After pressing on the saloon doors that are displayed after booting, and editing or selecting a name off the scoreboard, you become part of a six-hand game against opponents like Wild Bill, Black Bart, Shady Sadie, Mad Max and One-Arm Joe. The deal moves around the table with each hand, and is lightning fast. A menu option allows the card animation to be suppressed if you're in a real hurry to lose your money.

A separate window appears as necessary to allow you to indicate discard options. Hands are displayed sorted, and the machine

provides default discard guesses for you that are almost always correct, so you just have to click on an OK box most of the time. A special "teach" mode is also available that reveals the opponents' cards and lets you single-step through every move in the game,

since its normal and high-speed modes may be too fast for beginning players. Teach mode also gives you a good chance to determine the built-in strategies of your opponents.

We did notice a few things that could be

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Signal #16, September 1984: Priam's DataTower Arrives For Tests • This Month's Mailbag • More Notes On Tecmar's Mac Drive • Mouse Stampede Gets A Thumbs Up • Subscriber Interests And Activities • Received, But Not Yet Reviewed • Two More User Groups Check In • 16 pages.

Issues #1 through #12 are 7 x 9 inches. Issues #3 through #5 and #7 through #12 are not typeset. Macintosh coverage began with issue #9.

improved. The quality of the music that appears with the saloon doors and when the player wins or loses leaves much to be desired. Fortunately, a menu option allows the sound to be turned off. The action in normal mode might also be just a tad too fast. Instead of being able to follow all the discards and bets by opponents, the action tends to whip right by, and you must then examine each opponent's window and comments to deduce what has taken place.

Also, multiple copies of a few of the boxes that must be clicked on from time to time are displayed, apparently to make it easier to hit one, but the redundant extras just tend to distract, confuse, and clutter up the screen.

Despite those minor rough spots, Real Poker's speed, along with the five opponents, insure that there's always plenty of action. At one point we won \$42,522 on a full house. A little later we bluffed our way to a \$124,548 pot with a pair of jacks! Overall, the game is well designed and a lot of fun to play, so we give it a Thumbs Up without hesitation. 

Subscriber Interests And Activities

This is our third regular installment of excerpts from subscribers' letters. How come you haven't written us?

Terry Donohue, Alexandria, VA: We use Macs at work for graphics, slides, even camera-ready scientific papers. I am very interested in fonts, now having acquired 26 different ones for the Macintosh.

Steve Wilson, San Francisco, CA: We teach computer graphics at San Francisco State University with the Macintosh.

W. D. Brennan, Hopkinton, MA: I use Mac mostly for job-related things, although all our household correspondence now goes out via MacWrite (often enhanced by MacPaint).

Kenneth Kay, Orland Park, IL: I carry my Macintosh to work daily, a 90 mile round trip to a nuclear power station construction site. I use it to calculate engineering equations using Multiplan. MacWrite and MacPaint are used to create calculation template forms. At home the Macintosh is a much fought-over machine among my three kids. MacWrite is used to teach them word processing and writing style, while MacPaint lets them draw and draw without generating piles of scrap paper.

Darwin L. Hayes, Springville, UT: I have found that the Macintosh is totally adequate for writing short articles for my school work and for publication. I am hoping to learn enough to write a grammar text that will be suitable for use in the schools and for training teachers.

Dermot McDonnell, Galway, Ireland: I am working as a computer software engineer, although my qualification is a degree in applied physics. I have just started using a Lisa 2/10 under Santa Cruz Operation's Xenix. A Mac is my personal property for use at home. I write software for business use and small manufacturing operations as well as software for interfacing to equipment for measurement or control.

Michael Arenson, Santa Cruz, CA: We are setting up a microcomputer lab for the new Business Economics major here at the University of California Santa Cruz, and are equipping the lab with IBM-XT's and Apple Macs, as well as purchasing a Lisa for software development.

Frank Kral, North Brunswick, NJ: We are evaluating Macintosh computers for laboratory automation at Johnson & Johnson Products Inc. If successful, they will replace obsolete (slow) Tektronix 4051/4052 computers and become part of an AppleNet distributed data processing network. The Mac will be interfaced to instrumentation via RS232. All software presently used for data collection, data reduction, graphing and reporting was developed in-house using BASIC and some

ROM-based assembly routines. Software for Mac will be developed (transcribed) by us into MacForth or MacPascal. 

Received, But Not Yet Reviewed

IBM PC BASIC compiler for the Lisa, from Pterodactyl Software, Box 538, Fairfax, CA 94930.

Mac the Knife, MacPaint clip art from Miles Computing Inc., 7136 Haskell Ave. #300, Van Nuys, CA 91406.

Profit Projections/Breakeven Analysis management tool for the Macintosh, from Harris Technical Systems Inc., Box 80837, Lincoln, NE 68501.

Clip 1, MacPaint clip art from Frazier Peper & Assoc., Box 3019, Santa Cruz, CA 95063.

Frogger, an arcade-style game for the Macintosh, from Sierra On-Line Inc., Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93614.

MacManager, a business and management simulation game for the Macintosh, from Harvard Associates Inc., 260 Beacon St., Somerville, MA 02143.

MacNews, a periodic collection of Macintosh product descriptions and reviews, from 110 Baldwin St., Fall River, MA 02720.

MacCHECK, cash disbursements for the Macintosh, from Innovative Software, 4909 Stockdale Hwy. #169, Bakersfield, CA 93309.

1stBase, a relational database system for the Macintosh, from DeskTop Software Corp., 228 Alexander St., Princeton, NJ 08540.

PC to Mac and Back!, a utility to transfer files between an IBM PC and a Macintosh, from dilithium Press Ltd., 8285 SW Nimbus #151, Beaverton, OR 97005. 

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